

50th Anniversary of Roe v. Wade and Repro Shabbat Reform Movement Resources

January 22nd will mark 50 years since *Roe v. Wade* and the first anniversary since the Supreme Court overturned Roe last summer, paving the way for states to ban abortion and restrict other critical reproductive health services. As you incorporate reflection, lessons, and advocacy around abortion access and reproductive freedom in your community’s programming during this time, we share these resources. And mark your calendar for NCJW’s Repro Shabbat February 17th-18th (Parshah Mishpatim), when the Reform Jewish Movement will join with the wider Jewish community to recommit to reproductive freedom and the fight for a more just future where abortion is accessible to all.

In this document, you will find resources to use to include in your services and guide your lessons and advocacy for the anniversary, Repro Shabbat, and beyond.

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A Prayer for the 50th Anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*

Rabbi Emily Langowitz

Source of Life, Deep Well of Being:
 Be with us now as we mark this day; the dread it brings
 And its sacred power to compel us.
 Help us to hold our sorrow and our resolve in equal measure.

The arc of the moral universe is long, we know,
 And sometimes it bends
 backwards.
 So we must turn it, and turn it, and turn it again
 Striving ever onward toward a world built on justice
 And free from shame.

Comfort us, Compassionate One, in our sorrow for what has been lost.
Strengthen us, Rock and Redeemer, in our work to find it once more.
And give us hope that our nation and its laws might once again reflect
that each of us are Creators in the divine image of our Creator:

Able to speak our truths into being
Able to shape our worlds as we choose
Free to name, to imagine, to discern
What is good
What is good
What is very good

Prayer for Our Power, Prayer for Our Choice

Rabbi Stephanie Crawley

God of Mercy, God of Plague
God of Compassion, God of Righteous Anger

Teach us how to choose

Between the thunder and the dew
Between the match and the tear

Tell us when to pray and when to yell

Shout for the welfare of the government
Fight for the welfare of the government

Not for its own sake

But for ours

Not for the body politic but the body that has been politicized

We pray for the government because we fear it –

But maybe it should fear us

Let today be the day we learn our power.
May the nation merit our protection.

As we assert the ability to choose

How to breathe
How to birth
How to be in a body
How to be.

Blessing for Those Who Have Had or Aided an Abortion:

Rabbi Stephanie Crawley (Rosh Hashanah 5783 at Temple Micah, Washington DC)

Mi Sheiberach Imoteinu -God of our Mothers -

Bless these brave ones
Who stand before you

Be with them now- as you were with our mothers

God of Sarah,

Who aided her to have a child when she wanted it -because she wanted it

Be with them now

God of Rachel

Who suffered and suffered for a child and then died while giving birth -
Ensure that no one is forced into that same reality

Be with them now

God of Dinah -

Do not abandon us when we have had our bodies stolen from us through violence and
subjugation

Be with them now

God of Yocheved - the mother of Moses

Help us all maintain the ability to bring children into the world only when we want to -Only
when we've decided that the world is right

Be with them now

God of Hannah,

Who thought she only had worth because of her womb
Teach us all to see our value in our wholeness

Be with them now

Bless their holy bodies

And Bless their decisions -

The ones they had the ability to make

The ones that they fought to make possible
The ones that stood against immoral legislation
And the ones made in the embrace of freedom

May they always know agency and dignity and love

May this community never fail to rise in support

--

And Be with those who stand beside them in courage -

Who lend their voices and their funds
Who drive to clinics and accompany them inside
Who shout over protesters
Who ensure care and safety

Be with them now

--

And be with us all, now

Give us the strength to fight back and continue supporting women
Help us create systems of justice that serve *every* person
That center the souls that belong to bodies that others seek to ban

In this new year, help us build a new, just world

A world birthed of freedom and care.

Song Suggestions

Suggested by American Conference of Cantors

We Cannot Go Back

Cantor Lindsay Kanter, *inspired by the Jewish Rally for Abortion Justice in Washington DC, in May 2022*

https://youtu.be/0_NtNeQDwj8

Here I am, and here you are.
I came from down the street, you had to travel far.
I had to make a choice, you never had to choose.
But, together we must fight, or freedom we could lose.

Generations of women have fought.
We can't forget the lessons we've been taught:
We've got to move forward!

Chorus: The progress we have made, we cannot take in vain
We must March ahead: we cannot go back!
Look how far we've come, but the battle isn't won.

We must march ahead: we cannot go back!

The world is so complex, agendas hide unknown.
Promoting hate and lies, blaming and casting stones.

If we're compassionate, and lead with warmth and care.
Then, we can change the world, with love and hope and prayer.

Generations of women have fought.
We can't forget the lessons we've been taught:
We've got to move forward! (Chorus)

'Cause we are standing on a precipice of chaos, pain, and sorrow.
Let's work together to ensure a better future for tomorrow. (Chorus)

Carillon (We Won't Go Back): An Anthem for Reproductive Justice

Batya Diamond ([link](#))

Olam Chesed Yibaneh

Mechamen Creditor

Heal us Now

Leon Sher

Another Thing Coming, WRJ's new social justice anthem

Kyra Goldman ([link](#))

Talking Points and Key Facts

- ❖ **Jewish tradition recognizes abortion as essential health care, that is not only permitted but, in some cases, required by our tradition.**
 - ❖ The great physician and rabbi Maimonides stated that “if a woman is in hard labor...her life takes precedence over [the fetus'] life.” A woman is forbidden from sacrificing her own life for that of the fetus, and if her life is threatened, she is allowed no other option but abortion (Mishnah Ohalot 7:6).
 - ❖ The rabbis tell us that a physician's job is to heal, and if they withhold medical care, it is as if they have shed blood. “The Torah has granted the physician permission to heal, and it is a religious duty which comes under the rule of saving an endangered life. If he withholds treatment, he is regarded as one who sheds blood” (Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 336:1). Regressive state laws that prevent physicians and other providers from providing health care are in direct opposition to this sacred duty.
 - ❖ Rashi, an 11th century sage, holds that the pregnant person has more status than a fetus up until birth. As he explains it, “For as long as it did not come out into the world it is not called a living thing and it is permissible to take its life in order to save its mother.”

- ❖ The Torah also distinguishes between the value of the life of the pregnant person and the life of the fetus. In Exodus, we are told that if someone causes a pregnant woman to miscarry by pushing her, the person is responsible for paying a fine, while if the push causes the woman herself to die, “the penalty shall be life for life” (Exodus 21:22-24). The differing punishments distinguish between taking the life of the fetus versus that of the mother, giving more value to the life of the mother.
- ❖ Patients have an obligation to obtain health care. Our bodies and souls belong to God, and we must ensure that they are cared for. The verse in Deuteronomy (4:15) “You shall indeed guard your souls,” has traditionally been interpreted as commanding us to protect our health. The Reform Movement believes that this commandment extends to reproductive health.
- ❖ Not all people who can get pregnant are women, and reproductive freedom is not exclusively a “women’s issue.” **The fight for reproductive freedom, bodily autonomy, and abortion rights is for all, including non-binary, intersex, gender nonconforming, and transgender individuals.** Abortion access is vital for the LGBTQ+ community as it can be a form of gender affirming care and safeguard economic and bodily autonomy.
- ❖ **Use the word “abortion”** to destigmatize abortion care. When we say “abortion” instead of using euphemisms, it sends the message that abortion is not shameful and should be free from barriers. Stigmatization of abortion leads to more restrictions and inaccessible abortion care.
- ❖ **Roe was never enough.** It granted important legal rights but left too many people without the means to actually access abortion care. Incremental laws that restrict abortion have been an assault on peoples’ access for decades. Without Roe, we’re honoring the legacy of the generations of activism that came before us, while building beyond where we know it fell short and fighting for our new abortion future.
- ❖ **24 states are likely to ban abortion** in wake of the landmark Supreme Court case removing the constitutional right to abortion, *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*. In fact, **18 states have abortion bans or severe restrictions currently in effect**, ranging from total bans to bans up to 20 weeks of pregnancy.
- ❖ **The people hurt most by abortion restrictions are those who already face systemic and discriminatory barriers to accessing health care** — including women, Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), those working to make ends meet, members of the LGBTQI+ community, immigrants, young people, those living in rural communities, and people with disabilities.
- ❖ **Equal access to abortion care — everywhere — is essential** to social and economic participation, reproductive autonomy, and the right to determine our own lives. When abortion care is accessible, individuals, families, and communities thrive.
- ❖ As we create an expansive future for abortion access, we must follow the wisdom of states and individuals who are experts at building community care and networks of support, and reaching toward a more just future.
- ❖ **The Jewish community is fighting back, and we can win.** When we work together and follow the leadership of people and communities most impacted by abortion bans, we can find success. In

the 2022 elections abortion access prevailed. Through votes on ballot measures in Kansas, Kentucky, Montana, Michigan, California, and Vermont, voters resoundingly said they want to control their own bodies, lives, and futures.

Sermon Prompts

Written by Rabbi Emily Langowitz

For the 50th Anniversary of Roe (January 22nd – Shabbat to observe could be Friday, January 20th looking ahead – Va'era or Friday, January 27th looking back – Bo)

1. It has been fifty years since Roe v. Wade and less than one year since the decision which revoked the right to make individual decisions about when and if to end a pregnancy. What can the Jewish approach to grief teach us about how to navigate this moment?
 - a. “May its memory be a blessing” -- in what ways might the memory of Roe v. Wade serve as a blessing to us? How will it inspire us to continue the work of reproductive justice on days we feel we don’t have the strength? What would it mean for us to look forward, rather than always looking back?
 - b. Reciting Mourner’s Kaddish daily in the first year of life – speaking words about the sanctity of life and the holy in the midst of grief; how do we help ourselves orient to the sacred here? In what ways can we uplift the divine humanity in stories about abortion, miscarriage, childbirth, infertility, etc. In our communities? What is the daily practice that will help us gain strength to face our new reality? And to not lose sight of the magnitude of the loss of the constitutional right to abortion affirmed by *Roe v. Wade*?
 - c. Needing community – we cannot mourn alone. In Judaism, we need at least ten to say Mourner’s Kaddish. In this moment, we need to create community for one another now more than ever: to share stories, to grieve the devastating impact of the *Dobbs* decision, to connect people to resources, to support abortion funds and clinics, etc.
2. A sermon for Va’era: on covenantal legacy, finding one’s voice, and perseverance
 - a. The portion of Va’era opens with God affirming to Moses a covenantal connection to his ancestors, along with a long litany of the sons of each tribe. On this 50th anniversary of Roe, how might we lift up the covenantal legacy of our reproductive history in all its fullness, honoring the stories of pregnant people? Not just the children born, but the healthy and caring decisions made not to bear children, to be in partnership with God in that way as well. Might also harken back to Serach bat Asher, from Sh’mot, who we know in Jewish tradition is seen as a woman out of time, the one who knows where her ancestors are buried, who lives many lifetimes. How will we keep the legacy of Roe, and the ancestors who fought for it, alive?
 - b. Throughout this portion, Moses reminds God that he is *aral s’fatayim*, tongue-tied or slow of speech. Yet he is still called by the divine to use his voice. How do we lift our voices during this time, even if we fear we don’t know the right thing to say?

- c. This is a story of perseverance: from the get-go, God informs Moses that the fight for freedom from Pharaoh will not be easy. God will harden Pharaoh's heart. And yet, Moses must demand freedom anyway. Though the landscape of reproductive access changed over-night, it will not change back over-night. How will we, like Moses and the Israelites, prepare ourselves to persevere through the journey ahead, when many hearts are hardened against us?
3. A sermon for Bo: on perseverance, storytelling, and ritual
 - a. The plagues continue. This is a story of perseverance: from the get-go, God informs Moses that the fight for freedom from Pharaoh will not be easy. God will harden Pharaoh's heart. And yet, Moses must demand freedom anyway. Though the landscape of reproductive access changed over-night, it will not change back over-night. How will we, like Moses and the Israelites, prepare ourselves to persevere through the journey ahead, when many hearts are hardened against us?
 - b. *V'higad'ta l'bincha* - telling the story to our children. As the Exodus occurs, God is already thinking ahead to how this story will be told, such is the power of story. Story-telling is sacred in our tradition. We need to be able to hear the stories of Roe—before, during, and after—the stories of people who have provided and received an abortion, and the stories of activists who have been fighting for abortion access beyond *Roe*.
 - c. Story becomes ritual, and it is easy for ritual to become abstract. *Roe v. Wade* becomes law, fifty years of law, and somewhere in that, perhaps, we lose the stories that created the law. Passover is all about keeping stories within ritual. We eat this, because of this experience; we do this, because of what people we are connected to went through. We must not lose sight of the fact that protections for abortion access are not abstract laws. They directly impact the lived stories of human beings in every moment.

For Repro Shabbat – Mishpatim (Friday, February 18th)

In Mishpatim, Exodus 21:22-23, we read of a piece of case law about a pregnant woman who is inadvertently struck by two men during a public fight. The text tells us that there are two different punishments for two different scenarios: if she loses the pregnancy, her husband is owed a monetary fine; if she, herself, is killed, then *nefesh tachat nefesh*, life for life. From this, the Jewish conversation on abortion flows. Our tradition understands that there is a difference in status between full-fledged personhood and the potential of a pregnancy.

1. Judaism is an important voice in support of abortion access and must be taken seriously in public discourse.
2. Law and story are deeply intertwined. These verses describe a potential legal scenario, but surely there was a story behind it. How do we look beyond law and orient ourselves toward empathy, seeking to understand the barriers and societal stigma around abortion through the eyes of people who are actually experiencing it? The changes our society has gone through in this last year have not been abstract – they are actively changing the lives of pregnant people every day.

3. Jewish values are always about text in dialog with the lived experiences of Jewish people. The following two verses remind us of the retributive punishment first baked into Torah law: a life for a life, an eye for an eye, etc. The rabbis of the Talmud quickly did away with the literal meaning of these verses, replacing the Torah's standard call for capital punishment with monetary fines. We, too, have the permission to read our own standards and experiences into Jewish text. How can we allow the voices of those who have received abortion care to lead our reading of Jewish text and articulation of Jewish values?

Additional Learning

Learn about the Jewish history of the JANE abortion collective, in Jewish Women's Archive's (JWA) podcast, [Jane: Abortion Before Roe](#).

"Pregnant? Don't want to be? Call Jane." That was the catchphrase of the Chicago-based Abortion Counseling Service of Women's Liberation, better known as Jane. Before *Roe v. Wade* made abortion legal, the women of Jane provided safe, illegal, and affordable abortions to nearly 12,000 women in the Chicago area until seven "Janes" were arrested in 1972. In this episode of *Can We Talk?*, we hear from Jeanne Galatzer-Levy and Judith Arcana, two of the "Abortion Seven," as well as Jane founder Heather Booth.

Read more about [Heather Booth](#) and her work across movements on issues that are interconnected with the fight for abortion access.

For more resources to guide your learning about abortion access, check out:

- ❖ WRJ's updated [2023 Reproductive Health and Rights Page](#)
- ❖ [National Council of Jewish Women's Repro Shabbat resource center](#) to find program guides to help facilitate storytelling sessions and courageous conversations, torah text study, repro justice art, and programming for teens
- ❖ Moving Tradition's [Resources for Talking with Teens: Reproductive Rights & Sexual Health](#)
- ❖ Read the stories of people who have received abortion care, collected by [Advocates for Youth](#), and [share your own story](#), collected by JWA and NCJW

Ways to Take Action

1. **Amplify** [abortionfinder.org](#) & [INeedAnA.com](#) for people seeking abortions
2. **Donate** to [abortion funds](#), which provide financial assistance, travel, lodging, and many other types of support to abortion seekers.
3. **Honor** the 50th Anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* in your community and participate in NCJW's [Repro Shabbat](#) on **February 17-18** to uplift the importance of abortion access.
4. **Participate** in a local [Bigger than Roe: National Women's March](#) on January 22, 2023.

For more ways to take action, check out, [Path Forward on Abortion Resource Guide](#)